

STATEMENT OF REP. JOHN CONYERS, JR.
Floor Debate
H.R. 3036, the "Department of Justice Appropriations Authorization Act,
Fiscal Years 2004 through 2006"
Tuesday, March 30, 2004

I rise in support of this legislation. I first would like to commend Chairman Sensenbrenner for reasserting the Judiciary Committee's jurisdiction over the Department of Justice with this bill. In the past few years, the Justice Department has become increasingly resistant to congressional oversight, either refusing to answer questions or answering them vaguely at best. Fortunately, we worked together at the Committee level to address our concerns with the Department and arrived at the bill before us today.

While the bill has numerous provisions that are worth notice, I would like to concentrate on a few. First, the bill reauthorizes the COPS office. We all know that this Clinton Administration program has been increasingly vital in day-to-day crime prevention and crime solving. That is why COPS has received the praise of the Fraternal Order of Police, the largest law enforcement organization in the country. Local policing also is the backbone in our war on terrorism, as community officers are more likely to know the witnesses and more likely to be trusted by community residents who have information about potential attacks. This bill provides over \$1 billion per year for three fiscal years for this important program.

The bill also includes language offered by my colleague Rep. Adam Schiff to require the Attorney General to submit reports to Congress on the number of persons detained on suspicion of terrorism. This is important because the Department has thwarted congressional and judicial efforts to obtain justification for terrorism detainees. In the past few years, the Department's Office of the Inspector General has found that the Department and its components had abused terrorism suspects, pushing them into walls, leaving them in legal limbo, and depriving them of access to family or counsel. With these reports, elected representatives can better determine whether the Department is overstepping its bounds again.

Third, the bill gives the Office of the Inspector General over \$70 million for its responsibilities. In the past few years, the OIG has been diligent in overseeing the Department's war on terrorism, issuing reports on 9/11 detainees and pushing the Department to change how its procedures for handling terrorism suspects. The bill provides that the increased funding should be used largely for continuing these PATRIOT Act-related functions.

Finally, the bill recognizes the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. It was President Kennedy's vision that brought members of the bar together to fight for the civil rights of all Americans. The Lawyers' Committee continues that fight and deserves our recognition and thanks.

I urge my colleagues to vote "Yes" on this legislation.